

Nigeria hails 'historic milestone' after 3 years polio-free

August 21 2019

Nigeria on Wednesday announced that three years had elapsed since it last recorded a case of polio, a key step towards eradicating the notorious disease in Africa.

"Three years without a case of wild polio [virus](#) is a historic milestone for Nigeria and the [global community](#)," said Faisal Shuaib, director of the National Primary Health Care Development Agency.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, was the last country on the continent to suffer from outbreaks of the wild polio virus, but has recorded none since August 2016.

The West African giant will submit data on its polio cases to the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, a move that could pave the way for the whole of the continent to be declared free of the virus.

"If the data confirms zero cases, the entire African region could be polio-free by middle of next year," the WHO representative in Nigeria, Clement Peter, said.

The poliovirus infects the brain and spinal cord, potentially causing lasting muscle pain, weakness or paralysis.

The virus only infects humans, with young children highly vulnerable.

It is transmitted through contact with the faeces of infected individuals,

such as through unsanitary water or food.

It has no cure but can be prevented through immunisation.

Only Pakistan and Afghanistan are still battling incidents of the disease around the world.

The fight against the virus in Nigeria was slowed by the Boko Haram insurgency that has torn apart the northeast of the country over the past decade.

The insecurity, which has displaced more than two million people, hampered vaccinations in the region and prevented access to people in remote areas.

While fighting jihadists, Nigeria and neighbouring countries in the Lake Chad Basin have held polio vaccination campaigns to prevent the spread of the virus.

Once a worldwide scourge, the number of cases around the globe have fallen by more than 99 percent since 1988, according to the WHO.

In 2012, Nigeria had 122 [polio](#) sufferers, more than half of the 223 victims worldwide.

Despite the progress, aid organisations warned there could be no letup.

"The battle is not over yet," Pernille Ironside, Unicef's deputy representative for Nigeria, said.

"We have to maintain our effort and intensify them to make sure the historic gains are sustained."

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